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ABSTRACT

From the initial invitation for proposals from the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1962 until their end the reorganization of 1971, 16 "Project Social Studies Curriculum Centers" (PSSCC) existed at universities throughout the country. Social Studies programs came under fire from the educational reformers of the early 1960's. The activity-type social studies curriculum was viewed by some as too much play and not enough work. The PSSCC objectives were ambitious, reflecting both reforming zeal and naivete. Little is known about the administrative and organizational process the U.S. Office of Education used with the PSSCC. The result was a considerable degree of bureaucratic disorganization. The staffs of the centers in some ways determined the nature of the centers. The previous social studies curriculum development activities had not made such a conscious effort to combine the knowledge, skills, and experience of classroom teachers and university faculty. The materials and strategies produced represented the view points of a wider variety of scholars that had been true in previous attempts to write curriculum materials. The designs of the individual PSSCC organizational schema were practical and experimental, as were most of the developmental processes. Instructional strategies gave greater emphasis to decision-making and inquiry skills. While content objectives did not decrease in importance, the objectives of methods and strategies of the PSSCC were more process oriented. (PPB)

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A LOOK BACK AT PROJECT SOCIAL STUDIES

By William A. Spohn

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[Lyons, William H.]

A LOOK BACK AT PROJECT SOCIAL STUDIES

From the initial invitation for proposals from the Department of Health Education and Welfare in 1962 until their end in 1971, sixteen "Project Social Studies Curriculum Centers" (PSSCC) existed at universities throughout the country, with allocations of over one hundred thousand dollars each. Their areas of concern ranged in grade level from Kindergarten through the first two college years. Thus, for the first time, the federal government became directly involved in social studies curriculum development through a commitment of significant funds and human resources. These centers were to assume a major role in changing and expanding social studies curriculum during this period.

The federally funded Project Social Studies Curriculum Centers (PSSCC)[1] was a major event in the history of social studies curriculum development. Articles appeared regularly in the journals of social studies, history and curriculum development during the 1960's and early 1970's concerning the individual and collective work of the PSSCC. Entire states and many school districts across the country adopted the materials and methods developed by these centers. There was hardly a conference on social studies development or curriculum development or research which did not have more than one session which dealt with the efforts of the PSSCC. Very little is heard now. (When recently looking for a sample of one of the major audio-visual efforts created by one of the centers, neither the publisher nor any school which I knew had used these materials extensively for five to six years had any idea where I could find a copy). When discussing this event with others there is always misunderstanding and misinformation. The following is

reflection and discussion of the causes, nature, and impact of the Project Social Studies Curriculum Centers.

BACKGROUND

The period before the 1960's in Social Studies Curricula development was characterized by several themes.[1] (1)Conflicting interest groups including organizations such as the National Education Association, the American Historical Association, the Progressive Education Association, and local and state education agencies caused confusion in the direction and emphases of curriculum development processes. (2) The lock step view of content advocated from 1916 had made textbook publication a rigid process. (3) There was a separation of teachers and scholars, and textbooks offered by the publishers characterized this division. (4) The local nature of control of American education made social studies curriculum change local, superficial, inconsistent, underfinanced and lacking the involvement of the best scholars, both in the social sciences and in curriculum development.

Underfinanced, outdated, incoherent and lacking in consistency and direction... if social studies curriculum was to change it would require a new approach to curriculum change. The appearance of Sputnik on October 4, 1957, and its accompanying criticism of the schools acted as a catalyst, creating the desire for social studies curricula revision. It accelerated an already existent need for more emphasis on subject matter and academic discipline-centered approaches.

The "Sputnik" event amplified other calls for reform in social studies curriculum. American society of the 1950's and 1960's was changing rapidly. Social Mobility caused rising social expectations. There were changing needs caused by a changing

society and the civil rights movement. These social forces and the questions they raised helped bring about the Project Social Studies Curriculum Centers.

Social Studies programs came under fire from the educational reformers of the early 1960's. The activity-type social studies curriculum was viewed by some as too much play and not enough work --- substantive thinness.[3] Reformers such as Joseph Schwab, Jerome Bruner, Benjamin Bloom and Hilda Taba called for new approaches to curriculum and curriculum development. One writer described the criticisms of the traditional social studies programs by the reformers as follows:

a) too much emphasis on facts.
b) often inaccurate in subject matter or emphasis.
c) ignored large portions of the world.
d) developed little depth of understanding.
e) dominated by history and geography.
f) did not develop independent method of inquiry.
g) relied too heavily on expository teaching procedures.[4]

Other forces which prompted the new federal support were: federal support of developments in science and mathematics curriculum, the National Educational Association's desire for an expanded role of the U.S. Office of Education (USOE), and the existence of small state and local groups pressuring for improvements with federal aid.

The financial commitment resulting from the forces stated above was a significant new attempt by the federal government and USOE to meet the need for improved social studies curriculum and development processes. One need only look at the objectives of the PSSCC to see these forces translated into the goals of the PSSCC.

The PSSCC at Work

Objectives.[5]

The PSSCC were more concerned with curriculum development,

evaluation, and dissemination than with pure research. This is significant in terms of the nature of the thinking and were procedures which were used at the United States Office of Education and in the individual projects. These projects brought together groups of curriculum development specialists and scholars from the various fields of social studies to create and develop materials and approaches that reflected the most current and scholarly thinking in education and the disciplines of the social studies. The result was an intensive effort by varied subject matter and curriculum specialists to develop curriculum materials and approaches which were then used in the classroom before completion.

As a result of this approach a real change came about in dissemination and marketing. Where publishers previously were reluctant to spend to develop materials and approaches because of the absence of clear marketability of innovative materials and strategies, the PSSCC developed materials, approaches, and awareness, then worked with the publishers to disseminate the materials to the markets. The dissemination needs of the curriculum developers and the development needs of the publishers, were met, to some extent, in this new cooperative relationship.

The PSSCC objectives were ambitious, reflecting both reforming zeal and naivete. The development, evaluation, implementation and dissemination of a "K through 14" social studies curriculum as a four year project (University of Minnesota Center) is very ambitious, as is a four year social studies curriculum for able high school students (Carnegie Mellon University). Some of this excess can be attributed to a desire to submit a proposal worthy of funding. It is more likely

that the major source of over statement in terms of goals came from the lack of experience, both in the USOE and by the proposal writers in terms of large long term curriculum projects. Such global objectives were to contribute to confusion and frustration as the PSSCC went about their work.

ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION[6]

The funding of the PSSCC began in 1965 with the new emphasis in education which had taken root in the USOE. It ended because of changes at the associate commissioner or commissioner level and the accompanying new emphasis on technological developments such as instructional television and machines. New grants for research in subject matter fields were almost eliminated. It is clear the administration of the USOE and its continually changing administrative policies and procedures determined to an extent the nature and existence of the PSSCC.

Little is known about the administrative and organizational processes the USOE used with the PSSCC. For example, investigating this topic in 1972, I found the desire to assure the anonymity of those responsible for making decisions caused some previous USOE officials to hesitate to provide information pertaining to the sensitive decisions concerning funding and continuation of some projects. This is understandable as there was no clear policy regarding the assumed anonymity (provided in the interest of objectivity) of those recommending the projects to the USOE officials. It also hindered investigation of an important event in curriculum development. While the USOE did desire to become more systemized, a loosely administered program was in effect throughout most of the "life" of the PSSCC. The result was a considerable degree of bureaucratic disorganization

which project centers found unintentional and tolerable. How can this be? Of course changes in USOE program officers caused problems. There was a lack of needed and requested assistance. But in positive terms there was lack of interference. Also there is no evidence of censorship. There is some irony in the fact that the projects readily requested and accepted federal funds even as they expressed great concern about taking direction and censorship.

One of the most significant changes in USOE policy was the change in copyright policies. This change reflected an interest on the part of publishers and developers in the projects and their impact, and in the protection of a product created through federal funding by USOE. According to the original USOE policy it was not possible to copyright materials developed under USOE contracts of 1963. This restrictive, but understandable policy caused some (for example the Syracuse University Project) to refuse to disseminate their materials because of the confusion. Some good writers refused to participate because of restrictions on royalties. This was the case as reported in the Northwestern Project correspondence with the USOE. The USOE modified copyright policies to try to find a solution to the dilemma Then, effective June 8, 1970, the USOE instituted a new copyright policy reflecting the needs of the PSSCC, and USOE concerns. Under this policy a center's material would be published under a five-year contract with a publishing company having exclusive publishing rights. The university or center was to hold the copyright for five years, and then all materials were to go into the public domain. One-half of the royalties went to the USOE. One quarter of the royalties were divided among the authors. One quarter of the royalties went to the center.

The copyright issue and its' solution is an excellent example of how the PSSCC experience can be used today to avoid the mistakes and the problems of the past.

STAFF AND ORGANIZATION

The major expenditure of the approximately $4,750,000 granted by the USOE to the PSSCC, was for staff salaries.

The staff of the centers in some ways determined the nature of the centers. The college and social science backgrounds of the directors gave an indication why the projects continued to be subject-matter oriented. The assistant directors changed often, creating problems of stability in the individual projects. At least ten of the projects used subject matter specialists, with another eight using education specialists. Six of the PSSCC used evaluation specialists. Learning theorists were included as consultants in four of the projects. Specialist of various backgrounds were able to provide guidance and assistance to the developers. This certainly was an improvement over the typical one person or limited group social studies curriculum development activity of the past.

Hundreds of other people were included in the activities of the individual centers. Research assistants, mostly graduate students, worked in at least twelve of the centers, with a minimum of ninety-seven (97) persons serving in this capacity. This provided an opportunity for the students to practice curriculum development through involvement in major curriculum projects. Some of these students later became research specialists in social studies education and curriculum development.

Teachers from the public schools were used in field testing,

providing "feedback" on the effectiveness of the PSSCC materials and working with centers in other ways. These were teachers who had been part of the cooperative agreements between schools (on a local, state or national basis) and individual PSSCC from the beginning. Through this agreement, the classroom teachers gained access to experimental material previously unavailable to them. Formerly, teachers had little or no opportunity to work on major curriculum development projects. In addition, working with a project prepared teachers to lead school systems in curriculum development.

The previous social studies curriculum development activities had not made such a conscious effort to combine the knowledge, skills and experience of classroom teachers and university faculty. Many of the PSSCC staff leaders and graduate students previously had been classroom teachers. Thus, the commitment to unite the university and public schools was real and permeated the PSSCC.

Thus, one of the important benefits of the staff organization of the PSSCC was that so many people had an opportunity to take part in these dynamic social studies curriculum development projects. Directors and assistant directors had a chance to exhibit leadership capabilities in organizing and creating change. The consultants in all areas were provided opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills in varied areas of social studies curriculum. The graduate students and teachers in differing degrees, contributed to the development of social studies curriculum and curriculum in general. This development of a large group of trained curriculum specialists in social studies, curriculum development, and leaders in various areas of education may have been one of the

most important unplanned outcomes of the PSSCC. Previously, funding at these levels was not available to allow this amount of involvement and experience by so many individuals.

DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES, EVALUATION AND DISSEMINATION

Some significant differences were apparent between the PSSCC effort and previous efforts to change social studies curricula. The materials and strategies produced represented the view points of a wider variety of scholars than had been true in previous attempts to write curriculum materials. In fact, one of the most significant aspects present in this developmental scheme was the combination of the new knowledge and skills of the social scientists and the education specialists. Previous efforts on a national level which had produced guidelines, some course outlines, bibliographies and occasional sample lessons. The development of complete curriculum materials and strategies was seen as a much more specific task by the PSSCC. This also represents a significant difference.

The designs of the individual PSSCC organizational schema were practical and experimental, as were most of the developmental processes. The sources for both were primarily eclectic. Some of the thinkers who influenced the processes of curriculum development and instruction in the PSSCC as evidenced by the references in the curriculum materials and their writers included Bloom, Bruner, Keller, Schwab, Scriven and Taba.

Evaluation was a weak area of the PSSCC. This can be attributed to the lack of time, staff, funds, and the consideration evaluation received in the original proposal writing and review. Formative evaluation was to a large extent done thoroughly; however, the summative phase was limited.

Internal consistency is evident, but weak, in the areas of evaluation and dissemination. The planning, developmental and field-testing phases were for the most part consistent with the stated goals.

Several procedures were used to disseminate the data developed by the PSSCC. The Most Commonly used methods were project distribution of materials, commercial publications, articles, speeches, answering inquiries and teacher-training efforts.

MATERIALS AND STRATEGIES DEVELOPED

There exist both significant differences and similarities in the materials and strategies developed by the PSSCC and those that preceded the PSSCC. The rationale and objectives reflected a major departure from previous materials developed by publishers and national committees. Instructional strategies gave greater emphasis to decision-making and inquiry skills. While content objectives did not decrease in importance, the objectives of methods and strategies of the PSSCC were more process oriented and this orientation was equal to the importance of acquisition of content. Strategies that called for active student involvement in high level thought processes were specifically stated. This specificity of stated strategies was also a significant difference from materials produced previously either by publishers or national groups. Changes in strategies and objectives required additional in-service and pre-service preparation for teachers. This was a significant departure from past nationally-based curricula. It also was an area which did not receive the necessary continuous attention of the USOE, schools nor publishers. It is one of the major reasons the work of the PSSCC is not reflected today in the social studies

curricula of most schools.

In some ways, however, curricula developed by the PSSCC were similar to previous national efforts. For example, the PSSCC materials had a heavy emphasis on the written medium. But the type of written medium differed as there was less narrative and more primary sources. More non-print materials were included compared to previous prepared materials and guidelines. While the curricula developed by the PSSCC may have been different in approach, they were designed for the most part to fit existing social studies course offerings.

IMPACT

The data available concerning distribution and actual use of materials is partial at best, as the projects themselves did not keep much explicit data on this question and the commercial publishers were often uncooperative in providing data when asked. The number of students that directly used materials developed by the PSSCC numbered in the hundreds of thousands in the United States. Experimental, public domain and commercial versions of the PSSCC materials were used in a relatively large number of schools. Also these same materials had an impact on state adoptions of social studies materials. The materials developed had an impact on the commercial publishing houses in terms of production and ideas. For example Holt, Rinehart and Winston published a four year high school social studies curriculum developed by the Carnegie-Mellon University project which included integrated texts, audio-video materials, tests and detailed teachers guides with daily and unit plans. Other publishers did the same with materials and instructional strategies from other centers.

The PSSCC involved many professionals at different levels of experience in a new venture in curriculum development. The numbers affected are substantial if both the people directly involved in the PSSCC and those involved in the experimental use of the materials are considered. This new experience and training for social studies educators and other educational leaders is considered by some to be one of the most important contributions of the federally funded PSSCC.

But the use of much of what was specifically developed no longer exists. Change is a complex process especially when it involves human beings. it is this complexity which has caused the immediate results of the PSSCC to be forgotten. While those directly involved (and some indirectly involved) have continued to be involved in improving instruction, no continued demand on the part of publishers and classroom teachers for the work of the PSSCC occurred. Without a commitment of funding from the federal government and without demand for the materials and strategies produced by the projects the overt impact and promise of the PSSCC ended.

The statements made in this articled are based on documentation in an unpublished doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Connecticut: Spohn, William. A HISTORICAL AND DOCUMENTARY INVESTIGATION OF PROJECT SOCIAL STUDIES CENTERS. Storrs, CT. 1978.

2.Ibid.,# p.10-25.

3 John Jarolimek. "In Pursuit of the Elusive New Social Studies," EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP.30. Washington, DC: April,1#973. p.587.

4.Ibid.,# p. 597.

5.Spohn.,# op. cit.,# p.37-43

6.Spohn.,# op. cit.,#, p 43-123